Running towards Sustainability: The Life Cycle of Nike Frees

Throughout tennis shoe history, Nike had been one of the biggest contenders always fighting against Adidas or Puma to gain control of the whole tennis shoe market, and they finally got to that point after Nike introduced a new era of tennis shoes: Nike Frees. These extremely comfortable, weightless shoes are exactly what customers have been looking for, the sense of their feet being “free”.

To make these millennium of clothing accessories, one has to start by extracting the raw materials needed to complete the final product. This process starts in East Asia in the countries of China and Thailand where private companies complete the farming and cultivating of rubber and cotton which then they sell to Nike to complete the manufacturing of the shoe. Most manufacturing of Nike is made in Wuzhong; Suzhou; and Jiangsu, China. These factories are the ones that process and assemble the raw materials into perfect lightweight tennis shoe. Unfortunately, in these Nike owned factories, child labor was used which led to other problems in the news media. This also uncovered the use of slave wages and forced overtime which shamed the company.

The next step in the cycle is packaging. With millions of shoes sold every year, Nike has made advanced changes in their shoe boxes to minimize waste. They have reduced weight and materials used during the packaging process tremendously by using less materials. For example, they use 16% less cardboard than originally used per shoe box which translates to the savings of 5,000 tons of cardboard each year. Nike shoe boxes are also made from 100% recycled paper. In addition to the individual shoe boxes, Nike has minimized packaging carbon footprints by using water based inks/glues and making transportation cartons from over 80% post-consumer recycled materials. These advancements in the packaging process allows the product to be sustainable throughout the product’s life cycle.

To sell these precious objects, one needs to attract the customers which leads to the marketing department at Beaverton, Oregon, where the headquarters of Nike are located. With the new technological boundaries that have been broken by Nike, make their products differentiable from its competitors which creates high consumer rates. For example, the new innovative Nike Frees is easy to sell with the right advertisements projecting their uniqueness. In these advertisements, most of the time, an all-star athlete will be depicted wearing Nike
Research and product development is another part in the Nike Frees life cycle. Developers collect data and information to ensure that their products are made to meet consumer needs proudly and effectively. Researchers work with elite athletes and undergo tests to make advancements in fit, flexibility, traction, and cushioning. In addition to development in the shoe itself, developers work constantly on assuring Nike shoe’s sustainability. For instance, products are made from almost all recycled materials; The shoe stuffing is made from 100% recycled materials and the standard shoe boxes are made from 100% recycled paper.

Then, to get the Frees to the customers, Nike has to ship them all over the world just to get them to buyers in the United States. The distribution center for the U.S. is in Memphis, Tennessee but many of the factories are in China. To ship the products to the distribution centers in Tennessee and across the globe, the shoes are packaged in ships and airplanes and sent overseas to different countries. Nike makes most of their profit in the next step by selling these shoes to big-name retailers that sell the shoes to the people wanting to buy them. Nike keeps track of the shoes during the entire distribution process with computer systems and codes corresponding to each pair of tennis shoes. Nike have proposed ways to limit their CO₂ emissions but the carbon emissions from transporting their products rose 14% from 2003 to 2009 which makes it very questionable whether they are really as concerned about the environment as they claim to be.

Then, when the shoes finally arrive to the stores, the consumers buy them and tend to keep them for one to two years. What most people don’t know is that most goods are made to last a minimum amount of time to make consumers buy new ones and therefore make more profit. This means that the whole production cycle has to repeat itself a numerous amount of time plummeting the amount of raw materials available. Also, as time passes, new technology arrives which prevents the older Frees from being considered “cool” anymore. Thus, Nike will keep benefiting as they keep coming out with new models of the Nike Frees.

Finally, as the two year mark passes, the Frees life comes to an end and they are disposed. Fortunately, in recent years Nike has worked hard to reduced their footprint on the earth. They have found innovative ways to reduce waste from the life of their shoes. Based on the Nike website 1% of their waste comes from planning, 2% comes from design, 11% comes from production, 6% comes from transporting the product, 9% comes from selling the product, 13% comes from using the product, and 59% of the waste is reused. Nike has made lessening their impact on the environment has become a top priority for their company. They make their shoeboxes out of 100% recyclable material. They incorporated
Emilio Ramos Monzalvo
Julia Stenberg
Jasmine Graves
William Buchanan

material take back programs so that they can reuse the product and lessen their impact on the earth.

Citations

http://www.deq.state.or.us/lq/pubs/docs/sw/packaging/csnikeshoebox.pdf

http://free.sourcemap.com/view/10287#stop-8

http://www.nikebiz.com/crreport/content/environment/4-7-0-case-study-rethink-the-box.php

http://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/lbs-case-study/nike-marketing-strategies-global-brand/story/207237.html